



Working for Equality & Economic Liberation
32 S. Ewing #109
Helena, MT 59601
(406) 495- 0497
www.weelempowers.org

EXHIBIT 22
DATE 2.17.11
HB 546

January 17, 2011

Dear Chairman MacLaren and members of the House Local Government Committee,

My name is Layna George, and I am here as an informational witness for HB 546, which would prohibit counties and municipalities from offering certain products for sale or use in competition with for-profit entities. I am the Executive Director of WEEL—Working for Equality and Economic Liberation, a social and economic justice grassroots organization dedicated to putting people experiencing poverty first. WEEL is state-wide organization based here in Helena, and we develop and operate community gardens in Helena with support from neighborhoods, partner organizations, businesses, and the City of Helena. I would like to tell you about our community garden project, the Growing Community Project, so you can consider how HB 546 may affect community garden projects across the state.

Community gardens help families help themselves by providing space for growing safe, healthy, affordable food. Growing food helps families save money in a tough economy, and also helps develop neighborhood relationships. The Growing Community Project leases public parkland from the City of Helena, and we have an agreement with the City to build infrastructure within city requirements, purchase our own water, maintain the leased area, and to provide proof of insurance. The City of Helena provides water infrastructure for the community gardens located on public land. We promote and operate the community gardens, and community members rent plots for the year for a fee between \$15 and \$20, which goes towards covering the cost of the water. The gardeners grow food for themselves, their families, their neighbors, and for the local emergency food bank. Our relationship with the City of Helena is imperative to the success of the community garden program.

There are many communities across Montana that have developed community gardens in collaboration with their local counties or municipalities, and with infrastructure provided by these entities, including Great Falls, Bozeman, Lincoln, and Helena. There are community gardens in communities across the state that were developed and are operated by municipalities and counties. Other gardens rely on local government for infrastructure support, such as installing irrigation systems, water meters, and fencing. Please consider the effects that HB 546 will have on community gardens and gardeners.

Sincerely,

Layna George
Executive Director
Working for Equality & Economic Liberation (WEEL)
(406) 495-0497
lgeorge@weelempowers.org